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Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 65/239, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on continued action to implement the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, as well as steps to enhance world public awareness of the commemorative activities and the permanent memorial initiative.

Working in close collaboration with States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Group, the Department of Public Information organized the fourth annual observance on 25 March 2011 of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The theme of the 2011 commemoration, "The Living Legacy of 30 Million Untold Stories", recalled the estimated 30 million Africans who were uprooted by the system of slavery and whose many stories under that system have not been told fully. The theme emphasizes the importance of a more constructive portrayal in history and literature of the diverse skills which enslaved Africans brought to the homelands they were forced to adopt, and which were indispensable contributions to the economic foundation of the countries in the Americas and of the world economy of the eighteenth century.

The outreach and awareness strategy of the Department of Public Information utilized its network of information centres to disseminate the message of the observance internationally, and promoted partnership activities with civil society organizations committed to building awareness of the dangers of racism and racial discrimination, as well as the continuing legacy of slavery and the slave trade.

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Introduction

1. On 17 December 2007, the General Assembly, in its resolution 62/122, designated 25 March the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to collaborate with and build on the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including its Slave Route Project, to establish a programme of educational outreach to inculcate future generations with the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice.

3. By its follow-up resolution 65/239, the General Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to report on continued action to implement the outreach programme and steps to enhance world public awareness of the commemorative activities and the permanent memorial initiative.

4. The present report is submitted pursuant to those requests.

I. Background

5. As the largest forced displacement in history, the transatlantic slave trade tore millions of Africans from their homes, dragged them in chains to the Americas and sold them as slaves. The resulting system of trade and horrific slavery became two of the most important contributors to the world economy of the eighteenth century. Described as the first system of globalization, spanning four centuries, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the trade linked the continents of America, Africa and Europe, and for that reason, became known as the triangular trade. A concerted strategy of intellectual legitimization was undertaken to justify the trade. Its most salient outcome was the dehumanization of people of African descent, which led to a disturbing legacy of racism and racial discrimination in many countries.

6. The 2011 commemoration, organized around the theme "The Living Legacy of 30 Million Untold Stories", recognized the dearth of inquiry into the experiences of enslaved Africans, and a continuing gap in the literature regarding their individual and collective perspectives. While scholarly literature on the slave trade and slavery has provided deep insights into the magnitude of the brutal treatment and the condition of slaves, only a limited number of narratives have addressed the true identities of enslaved Africans, their beliefs, value systems, and expertise. As such, the diversity of skills and technological know-how which they brought to the Americas, and their invaluable contribution to nation-building there have not been sufficiently acknowledged. Among the enslaved Africans were native chieftains, agronomists, artisans in metallurgy, miners, weavers, and practitioners of traditional medicine, among a host of other professions. Those skills, which they transferred to their communities of enslavement in the Americas and elsewhere, subsequently facilitated the commercial mining of precious metals and contributed important agronomic knowledge for large-scale production of major tropical commodities, such as rice, sugar and cotton, all of which became the focus of plantation agriculture.

7. The theme of the 2011 commemoration highlighted the importance now accorded to the perspectives of the enslaved Africans.

II. The untold stories of enslaved Africans

8. There is now a growing awareness of the magnitude of this crime against humanity, a determination to ensure that it is not overlooked, and a resolve to secure for the enslaved Africans a more constructive outlook in scholarly analyses. Among the innumerable stories of enslaved Africans highlighted during the 2011 commemoration was *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London, 1789), whose author provides a first-hand account of his experiences from capture to influencing the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in Britain.

9. Stories of enslaved Africans often remain untold, in many cases because the custodians of those stories never had the opportunity to share them before their deaths. With reading and writing banned by slave masters, the only option for recording their experiences would have been the oral tradition. The rotation of slaves among plantations militated against the establishment of sustainable networks for handing down stories from generation to generation. Interest in telling the stories of enslaved Africans has increasingly grown in this century, particularly among their descendants, who are making great efforts to find archival materials documenting those stories, as told by slave traders, freedmen, maroons, missionaries, and multilingual slaves who learned to read and write in the languages of the countries of their enslavement.

10. New and continuing scholarship in this field is providing a more insightful look into the history of enslavement during the 400-year trade, as well as the legacy from the perspective of the victims. As part of the 2011 commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance, the United Nations Bookshop added to its collection several recent publications that reinterpret the history and the legacy of enslaved Africans and their contribution to building the societies in which they lived.

11. A documentary film entitled *Slave Routes: A Global Vision*, produced by UNESCO in 2010 in English, French and Spanish, was widely distributed during the commemoration, along with an accompanying pedagogical booklet, assessment fact sheets and a bibliography on the subject. Through the compilation of images, historical narration and interviews with experts from every continent, the film presents the diverse histories and heritages stemming from the global tragedy of the slave trade and shows how African slaves and their descendants, in contrast to inaccurate racial theories, helped shape the modern world. The documentary, which is accessible on the UNESCO website, has been extensively distributed and has received positive feedback. A number of United Nations information centres screened it during the 2011 commemoration.

12. Prior to, and during the 2011 commemoration, UNESCO initiated educational activities based on its collection of *General and Regional Histories*, which include volumes and chapters dealing with slavery and the slave trade. Digitalized versions of the *General History of Africa* have been produced and provided to schools in Africa and beyond, along with curricula that also render full accounts of the period of the trade.

III. Remembrance activities

Documentary film screening

13. The 2011 commemoration commenced on 21 March with the screening at United Nations Headquarters of the award-winning film, *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*. The film tells the story of the largest slave-trading family in the history of the United States, the DeWolfe family of Rhode Island. The 86-minute-long film follows the remarkable journey of a group of family members, including the director/producer, as they traced the Triangular Trade from Ghana to Cuba and then back to Bristol, Rhode Island and tried to come to terms with the role their predecessors played in slavery, and the history and legacy of the hidden enterprise of New England — slave trading. It illuminated the untold stories of the contributions that enslaved Africans made to the development of North America.

14. An audience of more than 300, including Member States, civil society organizations and students attended the screening, which provided moving insights into the African continent during the slave trade, plantation life and slavery in Cuba and the economic expansion in New England, fuelled by the slave trade. Following the screening, there was a lively question-and-answer session between the audience, the Chair of the Permanent Memorial initiative for victims of the slave trade and four members of the DeWolfe family, who were featured in the film.

Exhibition and cultural evening

15. On 22 March an exhibit entitled, "Honouring the Living Cultural Legacy" opened at United Nations Headquarters. It underscored the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, and illuminated the living legacy and the untold stories of the victims. The first of the three-part exhibit entitled "Ancestral Memories: Legacy" was a mixed-media installation, arranged by an artist from Puerto Rico to symbolically recreate the Middle Passage. The second part, entitled, "Pourquoi" ("Why") took the form of a large canvas triptych created by a Senegalese artist. It illustrated through graphic textures reminiscent of archival materials the inhuman practice of cramming enslaved Africans into slave ships. The third part was a collection of artefacts and documents on the slave trade system from a collector in the United States of America. One of the displayed items was a 50-pound "slave ball", typical of the ones used to limit the movement of slaves and so-called trouble-makers.

16. The culinary component of the programme demonstrated the marked influence of the slave trade on the cuisine in West and Central Africa as well as in Caribbean countries. The food exhibition aptly underscored the inter-woven nature of the culinary traditions of the African continent and the Caribbean region, especially how food crops, such as yams, rice, millet, and okra, indigenous to the African continent, were transferred to the Americas by the slave ships and eventually became staple foods there. Similarly, food crops from the American continent, such as cassava, maize, tomatoes, potatoes and avocados, were transferred to the African continent via returning slave ships, leading to their eventual integration into the food culture of coastal African communities.

17. The cultural aspect of the event featured performances by the National Ballet of Cameroon, traditional dance by an ensemble from Equatorial Guinea, steel pan

music performed by an orchestra from Antigua and Barbuda, and folkloric dancing by the St. Lucia Cultural Organization.

Global videoconference for educators

18. As a pioneering initiative, a global videoconference for educators was organized by the Department of Public Information on 23 March. A total of 150 educators at United Nations Headquarters connected by videoconference to 180 counterparts in six countries (Colombia, Portugal, the Gambia, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America). The full-day conference, organized into two panel discussions, emerged as an effective forum for sharing information on the importance of teaching the transatlantic slave trade, examining past accomplishments and new pedagogical directions, and illustrating best instructional practices and resources in primary and secondary school classrooms.

19. There was recognition at the conference that while the slave trade and its legacy of disenfranchisement and racism lie at the heart of the contemporary experience, teaching about the transatlantic slave trade remains a genuine challenge requiring research, innovation and imagination. Seeking to address these multiple pedagogical challenges, the conference combined a scholarly symposium with information update panels, how-to peer presentations and hands-on teacher exercises. Contributing scholars and experts represented universities, teacher training institutions, public history repositories, and primary and secondary schools. The webcast of the videoconference has been archived at www.un.org/webcast.

20. UNESCO, a key partner in organizing the global teacher videoconference, shared its knowledge and experience in that field, and secured the participation of teachers from the UNESCO Associated Schools Project.

21. The keynote presenter for the conference, Sir Hilary Beckles, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal, University of the West Indies, Barbados, spoke on the topic "What Does it Matter to Me? Addressing the Importance of the Transatlantic Slave Trade".

Department of Public Information-non-governmental organization panel discussion

22. A non-governmental organization briefing on "The Transatlantic Slave Trade: The Living Legacies of 30 Million Untold Stories" was held on 24 March as part of the commemorative events. Approximately 110 participants heard presentations by four panellists and the Chair of the Permanent Memorial initiative. Among the panellists were Alvin Thompson, Professor Emeritus of History, University of the West Indies, Barbados; Michael Gomez, Professor of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, New York University and President of the UNESCO International Scientific Committee for the Slave Route Project from 2009-2011; and Abena Busia, Associate Director of the Centre for African Studies, Rutgers University. The panel examined the untold stories of the millions who endured unspeakable brutality during the transatlantic slave trade and how those stories could serve as tools in raising awareness about this issue.

Solemn commemorative meeting of the General Assembly

23. The highlight of the official Day of Remembrance was the solemn commemorative meeting of the General Assembly. In his address to the Assembly, the Secretary-General pointed out that although extensive scholarship had documented the horrors of the slave trade, much more remained to be learned about the millions of Africans who were uprooted and abused, about the misery visited on their descendants, and about its continuing impact today.

24. The keynote speech by Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University, in Rhode Island, further echoed the systematic abuse of human rights which characterized slavery and the slave trade, and provided insights into the programme of atonement undertaken by the administration of Brown University to make amends for the deep involvement of the founders of the university in trading enslaved Africans. Statements by the President of the General Assembly and by representatives of regional groups highlighted the massive displacement of people, unparalleled in human history, and the abhorrent nature of this crime against humanity. The statement of the African Group was presented by the Deputy Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, H.E. Salomon Nguema Owono.

25. A moving presentation by the National Ballet of Cameroon illustrated the singing and drumming that is characteristic of West Africa, while a riveting song rendition by a Grenadian performer stirred the audience.

26. In honour of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, the Minister of Culture of Cameroon, H.E. Ama Tutu Muna, on behalf of the Government and people of Cameroon, presented a gift of a drum to the United Nations, which was received by the Deputy Secretary-General during the commemorative meeting.

Living Legacy Concert

27. The week of commemorative activities concluded on the evening of 25 March with a concert in the General Assembly Hall, organized by the Department of Public Information, in partnership with Equatorial Guinea, Chair of the African Union for 2011, and with the collaboration of the States members of the Caribbean Community and the Group of African States. Entitled the "Living Legacy Concert", it illustrated the influence of African music on the music of the Americas. The event opened with traditional drummers from the National Ballet of Cameroon, and also featured Khaira Arby of Mali; a performing arts ensemble from Equatorial Guinea; Aurelio Martinez, a Garifuna artist from Honduras; Melba Moore of the United States of America; the Randy Weston Quintet of the United States; and Morgan Heritage of Jamaica. The webcast of the concert has been archived at www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/index.html.

Media briefing and coverage of the Fourth International Day of Remembrance

28. A media event on the official Day of Remembrance was held to brief journalists on the progress of the permanent memorial, an initiative championed by CARICOM, with the support of the States members of the African Union and other Member States. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/122, the memorial, when completed, will be erected on United Nations premises in acknowledgement of the tragedy and in consideration of the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee on

Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade informed the media of progress made in regard to mobilization of resources for the Permanent Memorial Trust Fund.

29. Following the announcement that UNESCO would launch an international design competition for the Permanent Memorial in 2011, a memorandum of understanding on the competition was signed between the Permanent Memorial Committee, the United Nations Office for Partnerships and UNESCO.

30. As part of its outreach programme, the Department of Public Information facilitated the live webcast of events organized for the observance. Excerpts were made available through the UNifeed programme to television stations worldwide. United Nations Radio produced several documentaries and news stories on the commemoration, while the Media Liaison and Accreditation Unit provided services to journalists who reported on the commemorative events. Coverage of the Remembrance events by United Nations Radio, United Nations Television, United Nations Webcast, and the United Nations News Centre are posted at www.un.org/events/slaveryremembranceday. A Facebook page and a YouTube video about the International Day were also created by the Department of Public Information.

31. The Remembrance activities were covered by diverse media houses, including the Fox Broadcasting Company, New York 1 Television and the *Providence Journal* newspaper, the Kuwait News Agency, the *Jamaica Observer*, modernghana.com and panonthenet.com.

IV. Information outreach and resources

32. For the 2011 commemoration, the Department of Public Information created a special logo, a commemorative poster, postcards, bookmarks, t-shirts and mugs depicting the theme, "The Living Legacy of 30 Million Untold Stories".

33. The Department established a website in the six official languages of the United Nations to facilitate global access to the commemorative activities. The site provides educational resources on the transatlantic slave trade, with links to the message of the Secretary-General and events at Headquarters and around the world, as well as related documents (www.un.org/events/slaveryremembranceday).

V. Outreach through United Nations information centres in collaboration with civil society organizations in Member States

34. United Nations information centres, services and offices around the world organized educational outreach activities to raise awareness of the International Day in collaboration with local partners, including host Governments, media, civil society, youth associations, and academic institutions.

35. The following summary describes the activities undertaken by centres during the week of the commemoration:

- Prominent posting of the message of the Secretary-General for the International Day on the websites of the information centres and its timely dissemination to the media and a wider civil society

- Screening of the UNESCO film *Slave Routes: A Global Vision* at a number of information centres, including Almaty, Antananarivo, Canberra, Dakar, Geneva and Ouagadougou
- Screening at the United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels of a documentary film entitled *Redlight*, a story about trafficking victims in Cambodia
- Workshop conducted by the Information Centre in Antananarivo on the theme: "Racism: The danger of racism and prejudice; lessons of the transatlantic slave trade", as well as a poem recital, a short play and dance on the theme "The transatlantic slave trade" at the Lycée Andohalo, followed by the screening of a documentary film *La traite négrière oubliée*, and a question-and-answer session
- Commemorative events organized by the Information Centre in Dakar, in cooperation with UNESCO and national stakeholders at La Maison des Esclaves (House of Slaves) on the Island of Gorée, a UNESCO world heritage site
- A four-part programme organized by the Information Centre in Dhaka, including a discussion session, a poetry recitation with leading contemporary poets, a film screening and a 15-minute drama, "We Sing of Equality", produced jointly with a private university
- A media workshop and panel discussion organized by the Information Centres in Ankara and Brazzaville, respectively, to mark the International Day
- An interactive forum organized by the Information Centre in Lagos, in collaboration with the United Nations Citizens Ambassador for Africa, included a film screening, an exhibition of artefacts on the slave trade, and the distribution of public information materials
- An exhibition and a series of lectures organized by the Information Centre in Ouagadougou, attended by 1,800 students and teachers
- An official commemorative ceremony on 23 March, organized by the Geneva-based Group of African Member States, in collaboration with the non-governmental organization umbrella organization, World Anti-Racism Network, assisted and publicized by the United Nations Information Service at Geneva

The 2011 com nemoration served to further institutionalize within the international community the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance, which is being observed in a growing number of countries.

VI. Partnerships with Member States and other stakeholders

36. Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, two States members of the African Group, both of which were severely impacted by the slave trade, served as significant partners in the fourth annual commemoration at United Nations Headquarters. Equatorial Guinea contributed counterpart funding, as well as a cultural ensemble, and was represented at the commemoration by a high-level delegation, led by the Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for Social and Human Rights Affairs.

Representing the African Group, the Deputy Prime Minister addressed the Cultural Culinary Evening and the Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on 25 March, while the cultural ensemble of Equatorial Guinea participated in the Cultural Culinary Evening on 22 March, and in the Living Legacy Concert on 25 March.

37. Cameroon also participated actively with a delegation led by the Minister of Culture. Performers from the National Ballet of Cameroon made artistic presentations at a number of events throughout the week, including at the Cultural Culinary Evening on 22 March, the Global Videoconference for Educators on 23 March, the Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly, and the Living Legacy Concert on 25 March. At the commemorative meeting of the General Assembly, the Minister of Culture of Cameroon presented the United Nations with a special drum, a gift from the Government and people of Cameroon. She also served as a panellist in the press conference for the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

38. Other Member States transmitted information on national educational programmes as requested in paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 65/239. The following summary describes the activities:

(a) The Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs facilitated a travelling exhibition entitled "Human Trafficking — Slavery in the 21st century" and issued an information brochure for teachers as a companion piece;

(b) A total of 22 Danish schools participate in the UNESCO Associated Schools Project with a focus on the transatlantic slave trade. The Danish transatlantic slave trade school network also develops teaching materials and provides free public access to the materials on its website (www.unesco-asp.dk);

(c) In the Dominican Republic, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade form part of the curriculum for grades 5, 6, 7 and 8;

(d) Jordan includes the history of slavery and the slave trade in its school curriculum for grades 8, 9, 11 and 12;

(e) Mexico has established the Museum of Afromestizo Cultures to disseminate information about the history of Mexicans of African descent. To commemorate the International Year for People of African Descent in 2011, the National Anti-Discrimination Council organized a number of activities to make the contributions of African descendants in Mexico more visible.

UNESCO contribution to the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade

39. The Secretariat programme of educational outreach on the slave trade also relies on the pedagogical initiatives which form an essential part of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched in 1994. They include materials developed for education and outreach, especially in the framework of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Education Project of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, which was created in 1998. The Transatlantic Slave Trade Education Project facilitates educational exchanges, shares good practices, develops and distributes educational material with a focus on the three main regions involved in the triangular transatlantic slave trade (Africa, the Americas and Europe).

40. Against the background of the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and the 2011 International Year for People of African Descent, UNESCO mobilized a number of school twinning projects on the transatlantic slave trade during the school year 2010/11. UNESCO also developed an online platform to facilitate school twinning which profiles participating schools and teaching projects, and recommends teaching methods and resources to facilitate school twinning.

VII. Future activities

41. The Department of Public Information will continue to deepen its collaboration with Member States and pursue a range of initiatives in partnership with African and Caribbean Member States. Efforts will be directed towards the implementation of a longer planning framework to allow for a more effective development of commemorative activities.

42. With respect to the permanent memorial initiative, of which CARICOM serves as the primary custodian, in close collaboration with the African Union, the United Nations Office for Partnerships and UNESCO, the Department of Public Information will continue to lend its full support to the promotion of the initiative, and participate in awareness-raising activities, utilizing its network of information centres.

43. The Department will deepen its relationship with Amistad America, Inc., and will seek and build relationships with research institutions, schools, colleges and other entities involved in the study of the slave trade, and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice. Efforts will continue towards deepening the collaboration with UNESCO, including dissemination of the educational materials developed under the UNESCO Slave Route Project.

44. The Department will focus attention on consolidating the partnerships developed in 2011 and in past commemorations with civil society organizations, museums and academic institutions engaged in promoting new knowledge on the slave trade. Attention will be directed towards partnering with such entities, with a view to expanding the scope of activities designed to reach an even wider audience.